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Preview

Typical Family

By Henry Mitchell

Tonight Channel 26 (WETA-TV) zeroes in on "the Middle American," who may be a critical man in this year's national elections, and finds him decent and uneasy.

The half-hour show at 8 p.m. is the second in "A Public Affair," a series that will continue the rest of the year, showing some factor of politics each week, but always with attention to the voter rather than to the institution.

Rober Lissit, who directs tonight's show, spent several days with Mr. and Mrs. Richard Johnson of Rolling Meadows, Ill., a Chicago suburb. He found them simply by asking questions—he wanted a typical Middle American family, neither rich nor poor, neither bigoted nor avant-garde.

Johnson makes about $10,000 a year and his wife makes $5,000. They have two daughters and a son.

They are ardent churchgoers—Lutheran—and both sing in the choir. Their first check each month, their first payment, goes to their church.

Their teen-aged son works after school in a special-hours grocery, saving half his pay toward his college expenses. Their house cost about $25,000. They have two cars and they buy very little steak but a good many expensively packaged goods at supermarkets. They have a kitten, a black and white television set, and a good bit of trouble making ends meet.

Senior correspondent Robert MacNeil asks them if they think they might do just about as well on welfare, and they say maybe so, but they feel a responsibility to earn their own way. They also feel that it's right for welfare to go to the poor—they don't resent it or feel that welfare recipients are free-loaders.

They simply worry a good bit about how they're going to pay their children's college bills. Any candidate that dealt with that question would attract them.

One of their most significant attitudes is not emphasized—the Johnsons seem honestly to believe they'd do about as well on welfare. They refer to themselves from time to time as "the small man" or words to that effect, and they think in terms of "surviving."

They do not consider their $15,000 income puts them in a statistically favored grouping, and to them, they make clear in their talk, "survival" means "middle class."

Johnson said he did not himself have a very good education, and he wants his children to go to college. "Survival" also means upward mobility.

It would be hard to find a neater family—articulate, modest, wholesome, willling to forego an expensive TV set in order to pay church pledges and school bills—and in the market for a candidate.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Johnson watching Sen. Muskie's televised announcement of his candidacy.